

TIBERIUS

Meg Pittman leaned back in her swivel chair, holding her steaming cup of coffee in both hands under her nose. It was hazelnut, and the smell was always cozy to her. It reminded her of log cabins, antique furniture, overcast drizzling days. She blew across the surface of the coffee, ostensibly to cool it, but in actuality, in her secretest heart of hearts, she was amusing herself creating the little waves across the coffee's surface and imagining that this was also causing the ocean waves she looked down on. She had spun her chair around to face her office's window, which overlooked the Indian Ocean from a fifteen floor vantage.

Chance, who stood beside Meg, also looking out at the ocean, took a sip of her smoothie. Meg could smell the mixed berries, but could also smell in equal measure or more all of the additives. She didn't comment on it.

Instead, she, Meg, asked, "Have you ever gone surfing?"

"No," Chance said with a warm smile, a self-deprecating 'Heaven forbid' tone of voice. "I loved water parks as a girl. Sometimes I'd try to stand on those floating boards, what do you call them... But surfing, no, I never tried. Have you?"

"I tried," Meg said. "The first week I was out here I started lessons. I had never learned in Florida, and in Fort Worth, I mean, you couldn't. So I figured, new leaf, let's give it a try right away."

"And?"

"Fuuuck thaaat."

Chance let out a sharp laugh, and covered her mouth.

Meg smiled to herself, and had a tiny, tiny sip of her coffee.

"How do you think Pearson's presentation will go?" Meg asked.

Chance didn't answer right away. She took a moment to settle from her laughing outburst, and took a long, thoughtful sip from her mixed berry smoothie. Then she glanced over her shoulder for a moment, and then said in a hushed tone, "The board already made up their mind what they're doing."

"Yes," Meg said. She nodded. "I still want her to sell it though. Make it glaringly apparent it was already decided."

"Cheers."

The two of them gently clinked plastic cup and coffee mug.

Chance looked down at her wrist watch. She sputtered out a sigh. "Scrum meeting in three, I should give myself time to look at my notes."

"Scrum it up. Eugh that's such an awful name."

"You're telling me," Chance said, and then toasted Meg briefly with her cup, and took a drink as she turned to leave.

She closed the door on her way out.

Meg settled in her chair again, smelling the hazelnut, watching the waves out on the ocean. When the coffee was cool enough to take more than just a tiny sip, she downed the cup in one go, feeling the heat all down her throat and settling behind her ribcage.

As she was spinning the chair back around to actually get back to work, she was saved by the phone on her desk ringing.

"Desk of Meg Pittman."

"Hey Meg, Stefan here."

"G'day g'day."

"Getting better!" Stefan remarked. "Pitch perfect, in fact, but it still sounds a little canned. You can practice the phrases in the mirror all day long, but you really have to feel the Aussie spirit brimming up from the depths of your heart to fully capture it."

Meg, not having to fake an endeared amusement at least, said, in her normal American accent, "I'll take that under advisement. What's going on?"

“Nothing dire, I think. You know that, oh what is it, fulfillment, logistics, something like that, position we’ve been looking to create? I don’t have the exact title of it in front of me.”

Meg twirled the line around her finger. “I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Ah, well. Job open, need someone good with numbers, statistics, not going to be the lead on anything, doesn’t have to be Archimedes, but they should have a head on their shoulders. One... gentleman... who applied, put you down as a reference.”

“Oh. What’s the name?”

“That would be one James T. Kirk.”

Meg’s eyes shot wide open. She slapped her palm down on her desk. “Get out!”

Stefan gave a laugh, and said, “Yeah! Yeah yeah yeah. You know him?”

“Yeah, I know Tiberius.”

“This is real, then? I’m not hiring the captain of the Voyager?”

“Enterprise.”

“What’s that?”

“Kirk was captain of the USS Enterprise. Voyager was a different series.”

“Ah right.”

“I only know from knowing him, I never watched any of them,” Meg clarified. She then cleared her throat, sat up straight in her chair, and continued, “Yes, I do know a James Tiberius Kirk. His parents are big sci-fi dorks. But he is real, that is his real legal name.”

“How do you know him?” Stefan asked.

“We attended Athens together. High school.”

“Yeah, that’s the one he has down! Huh. His application seemed fit for the role. Experience as a CPA in California, extensive volunteer work for some kind of dog charity, helped with inventory management besides the hands-on work. I’m not really calling to grill you on him. I mainly just wanted to make sure the whole thing wasn’t fake.”

“Huh,” Meg said. She spun back to face out the window again, and again leaned back in her chair. “I didn’t know he went on to do accounting.”

“Got his certification and started work in 2017.”

“Right, that was after I knew him, yeah. Huh. Good to hear. Good for him.”

“Application form might say something about... yes, asks for all references to be from someone who’s known you for more than ten years, suppose no one at his current employment fits the bill.”

“Oh, that’d do it,” Meg agreed.

“Easy guy to get along with?” Stefan asked.

“Yeah, he was a great friend.”

“Any reason I shouldn’t hire him?” Stefan asked.

“Umm...”

2015

“Fuuuck me, there is already no way you’re going to be good to drive tomorrow, there is no fucking way you’re busting out three more bottles of vodka right now,” Tiberius said. His chin was augmented with red streaks from wine he had missed the mark on drinking. His dress that night, a white lacey thing, did no favors at all in obscuring the spills either.

“Not just any three bottles of vodka,” Meg said. One by one, she placed them down onto the little table between the couch and the TV: “Chocolate. Marshmallows. Graham crackers.”

“Nooo,” Tiberius bemoaned. “Goddammit, I can’t say no to that.”

“You in?” Meg asked Ron. Ron’s boyfriend, Terry, was asleep on Ron’s shoulder.

Ron said quietly, “One shot of the graham crackers. Curious about that one.”

Meg collected up used shot glasses from everyone, minding the same glasses would be going back to the same people. Between the bottles, she poured seven shots.

All three graham cracker shots were grabbed first. “Cheers,” she said, and they all drank.

“Oh that’s good, actually,” Ron said.

Meg agreed, but she and Tiberius were too busy grabbing their next shots to comment. Back to back, she and Tiberius did the marshmallow and the chocolate shots too.

Upon finishing his chocolate shot, Tiberius laid limply back in the couch, letting the shot glass fall out of his hand onto the carpet. "Fuck me that's good," he said.

"Three more?"

"Go. Fuck yourself," Tiberius said drowsily. "Fight me with your main first."

"Toad!" Meg said, a nickname Tiberius had. "You can't hold a shot glass right now, you're going to puke if you try to play another round."

Tiberius, not attempting in the slightest to get up or look around, felt around blindly with his hands, saying, "Where's my controller."

Meg grabbed it off the floor and handed it to him.

Tiberius held it with all the confidence in the world, head lolled back, facing the ceiling, mouth hanging open.

"Toad. Are you going to look at the screen when we play?"

"When it starts."

Meg brought them to the character select screen of the fighting game that was in.

Still facing the ceiling, Toad selected his main on muscle memory.

Meg groaned. "This is going to be so embarrassing."

"Yes," Toad said.

Meg selected her main, and confirmed the start of the fight.

As the timer was counting down, Tiberius was still facing the ceiling.

As soon as it began, the sounds of both of them manipulating their controllers filled the air, clicking and mashing and sliding. Toad slammed Meg's guy into the ground repeatedly until it was over.

Mouth agape, Meg turned to Toad, who was still laying back on the couch, facing the ceiling. "Tiberius!"

"You were right, I really can't deal with the movement on the screen right now, I couldn't look."

"Toad," Meg said.

"Meg."

"Toad," Meg repeated, and slumped over onto him, putting her hands on his shoulders.

"Meg. What?"

“Fuck. You,” she said, and then weakly headbutted his chest. Basically just got the dampness of the wine on his dress onto her forehead. “Fighting games are about highly, highly honed reflexes.”

“Yeah.”

“You are so drunk I’m shocked you’re not puking.”

“Yeah. Same. I might be able to deal with another shot of that marshmallow though.”

“You weren’t even looking at the screen.”

“I was listening.”

“Oh my fucking god.”

Over on the other side of the couch, Ron was getting up, keeping Terry’s arm around his shoulders. “Gonna get us home,” Ron said.

“Walk safe,” Meg said. Then to Toad, she said, “We should both get to bed.”

“Yeah,” Toad agreed.

They both continued to lay there, Toad laid back on the couch, Meg sprawled over Toad.

Toad began snoring.

Meg rolled her eyes, and figured she would get up in a sec and get to bed in her room. Instead, Tiberius’s rising and falling stomach was comfy enough that she settled in and gave up on not falling asleep before she had realized it.

In the morning, she got up off of Tiberius, who was still snoring. She sat on the couch looking around the living room. Empty hard cider bottles stood on the little table, and several were piled unceremoniously to either side of the couch. Three bottles of flavored vodka stood centerpiece on the little table. The TV was still on, playing the gameplay demo of the fighting game.

Meg found the remote and turned the TV off, then stood and walked to the kitchen for a glass of water. She did have the tiniest headache, but she was usually fine at bouncing back the morning after a night of drinking, and that held true for that morning too. By the time she took a shower and got into a new change of clothes, she was ready go get on the road like they’d planned.

As she returned to the living room, she saw Toad sitting hunched over at the center of the couch, bottle of marshmallow vodka clutched in his hands. He had changed out of his white dress, and into a black t-shirt with orange gym shorts. He glanced up at her. "Hey," he said, and then took a drink of the vodka.

"You ready?" Meg asked.

Tiberius nodded. "I guess so. We're really doing this?"

"I will basically call you a pussy if you back out at this point."

"Sexist."

"You watch your cis drag wearing mouth."

Tiberius giggled, and then took another drink.

Meg, as much as she loved ribbing him, pointedly restrained herself from ribbing him about getting drunk immediately that morning. It was in line with the plan.

Tiberius set the bottle down on the table, where it made an empty thump.

"You ready?" he asked.

Meg took her car keys out of her pocket, and spun them around on her finger. "Bags are in the car, phone is charged, I'm ready to hit the road."

Tiberius groaned as he stood up. He grabbed the two remaining vodka bottles, one in each hand, and followed Meg out the apartment's front door.

It was a cloudy day. The blacktop parking lot of the apartment showed damp regions, signs that it had already rained some earlier in the morning or sometime the previous night. On the way to the car, the two glanced around. Nobody else in the parking lot. Nobody passing by on the sidewalk adjacent. Meg unlocked the driver's side door with her key, got in, and leaned over to unlock the passenger door. Toad got in, and they both slammed their doors closed.

"Are we really doing this?" Toad asked.

"I mean, we don't have to, but with that said yes we absolutely are."

"Yeah, but like... this part?"

"Don't be shy," Meg encouraged. "You said you would love to go on a road trip, but have trauma of worrying you'd ruin it by having to stop for a bathroom every ten minutes—"

Tiberius protested, "I don't think I used the word *trauma*."

"Well it sounded like that's what you were getting at," Meg said, half teasing.

Tiberius sighed. He set the two vodka bottles in the car's cup holders. "Yeah. I still don't know what it is, if it's the seatbelt or the bumping road or just worry at being confined, but I swear it's like, the second I get in a car I have to go."

"Yeah. I thought we had a fun time outlining all of the ways we could make it work for you."

"It was fun *talking* about it," Tiberius said. "When I thought we were *joking*."

"And what did we come up with?"

"Basically two things. Number one, I get to be drunk the whole time."

"Number two, put on one of those diapers already and pee yourself to your heart's content, no one on the road would possibly be able to see you below the waist while we're driving."

And they weren't even going anywhere in particular. Just getting on the highway north until she spotted a motel that struck her as somewhere they could stay the night at.

Tiberius took a drink of the graham cracker vodka, and then said, "Alright. Keep a lookout for me?"

"Nah no one's around I'm going to look at your dick and balls to alleviate your modesty."

Tiberius reached down to the pack of adult diapers that sat on the passenger's side floor. He tore the packaging open, grabbed one out, and tossed the rest of the pack into the back seat. He took some time finding which way was forward and back on the grey diaper, and then he quickly stripped his gym shorts off, and replaced them with the crinkling material.

"Comfy?" Meg asked.

"I feel naked," Toad said.

"You were for a sec, I did see your dick and balls."

"Yeah. Oh my god. So, I peed in the sink while you were in the shower—"

"Woow, thanks for respecting my living space."

"—and I know we haven't even left the parking lot, but I do already have to go again actually, so since we haven't even left yet I might as well go back in for a second—"

Meg started the car, threw it in reverse, backed out of their spot, and began through the residential streets that would eventually take them to the highway.

"This is cruel," Tiberius said.

"Freeing," Meg countered. "The wide open road before you. The ability to pee or not to pee at any time you like. I say give it a test drive before we get on the highway."

"I..." Tiberius sat there for a bit. "I don't think I could if I wanted to."

"Just imagine you're at a urinal and someone is standing there beside you waiting for you to start going."

"Meg."

"Toad."

"That is the opposite of helpful."

"You're a nervous peeer?"

"Yes! How is that surprising!"

"It sounded like your peeing is out of control! It sounded like you can't *stop* peeing!"

Toad took a drink from the chocolate vodka, and then a drink from the graham cracker vodka, and then another drink from the chocolate vodka, and then said, "I think the anxiety is kind of self-defeating in either direction."

"Well, I'm sure you'll get there. Because you have no choice."

Toad took another drink from the chocolate vodka. "Can we turn on the radio?"

"Yeah. Do you want the radio or my phone?"

"Ehh, phone."

Meg took her phone out of her pocket, unlocked it, and handed it to Tiberius. Tiberius plugged it in to the aux cord. As he was going through Meg's music to choose something, the car went down the on-ramp and onto the highway.

Tiberius put on some Simple Plan.

"Oh shit, throwback," Meg commented.

The highway wasn't all too busy on that cloudy late-morning. Meg drummed along to the songs with her fingers on the steering wheel. Toad sat slumped back in his seat, staring spaced-out through the windshield at the sky ahead.

A few songs had passed before he said, "Oh that feels so weird."

“Did you pee!”

“Yes.”

“How is it!”

“It’s like. Aaaa. It isn’t like having wet clothes like from the rain. It’s like. A damp pillow inflating around my balls?”

“Oh, that sounds weirder than I expected.”

Toad took a long drink of the graham cracker vodka and finished it off.

“I don’t hate it,” he reported.

“Good. Think this is going to work?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

Simple Plan continued to play on the radio.

Meg giggled, and commented, “I can hear you peeing this time.”

Tiberius didn’t stop. “Get used to it.”

“Fuck yeah, own this.”

Meg flicked the turn signal to get into the other lane to pass someone.

As the miles went by, Meg eventually noted the signs telling them they were crossing up into Oklahoma. Tiberius gave a surfer “tubular” hand sign.

He said, “I forgot what letter we were supposed to be on for the alphabet game.”

“Oh, I forgot we were playing, yeah. Oh well. Oooh, how about never have I ever?”

“Nooo I’m too drunk, I’ll tell you secrets,” Toad said, and then flopped an arm around in search of a bottle. In the cup holder, his hand found a bottle of peppermint schnapps that he’d taken out of the glove box. He drank some, and then set it back down in the cup holder again.

“You are actively peeing in a diaper right this second,” Meg pointed out.

“Yeah?”

“So I feel like it would be fair to say we trust each other,” Meg continued.

“Yeah.”

“So what secrets do you have?”

“Ugh. I don’t wanna say. You can know, but I don’t wanna say. We can do never have I ever. Remind me how it works.”

“Hold up ten fingers,” Meg said.

Toad did. Meg did too, driving with her palms.

“Now we take turns. I say a thing I’ve never done. If you’ve done it, you—”

“Bestiality,” Toad blurted.

“Wait, what?”

“I’m only into bestiality, that was my secret,” Toad said. “I didn’t really understand the game, sounds like a lot of double negatives, hard to follow, I thought I’d just say it and get it over with.”

“Huh.” Meg lowered her fingers, taking hold of the wheel again.

Meg heard the muted patter of Tiberius letting out another squirt.

A second after he was done, he asked, “Have I ruined everything?”

“How the fuck did this never come up before?” Meg asked.

Tiberius reached for the peppermint schnapps. Meg swatted his hand, and he drew the hand back, empty.

“No, seriously, how did you never say anything about that until now?” Meg asked. “How did I never say anything about it to you?”

“What?”

“Zoophile,” Meg said. “That’s the word for it. You’re a zoophile, right?”

“I’ve heard that and bestialist, yeah.”

“I’m only into bestiality too,” Meg said.

“What?” Toad said. He sat up straight in his seat, his diaper making a squishing and wheezing noise. “Meg what the fuck.”

“You what the fuck!”

“This is insane,” Toad said. He grabbed the peppermint schnapps quick and had a drink, then sat holding the bottle, arms limp laid over his legs. He flexed his entire upper body, and a loud fart smacked its way out of him.

“Good push,” Meg commented.

“I really thought I could sneak that one out,” Toad said, turning a little red. “Thought it would like, mute the sound, but this situation is actually more like an amplifier.”

“Apparently. I mean, do do what—”

Toad snickered.

“Oh my god. No I’m sticking with that, you can giggle if you want: do do what you have to do. It was part of the understanding that all bodily functions within that garment are free from judgment.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to go that far.”

“Can we get back to this bestiality thing though!”

“Please,” Toad said.

“Have you done it!”

“Yeah. A lot. I work summers on my aunt’s farm for a reason. Basically why I never dated anyone in school. I was like, all good, didn’t have any further questions about what it was like that I didn’t get through with cows.”

“Funnnnnnn, that’s such a cool opportunity.”

“Yeah, it really is,” Toad said, nodding. “You?”

“Neighbor’s dog Garth. He’s so old now, but he’s still so friendly when he sees I’m back on a visit.”

Toad’s voice cracked as he said, “Oh.”

“What?” Meg asked.

Toad sniffled.

Meg glanced over, and saw that he was crying. “Hey,” she said. “Toad.”

Toad sniffled again. His face was contorted into a sudden sorrow, and tears made his cheeks glisten.

“Toad.”

Toad shook his head.

“Toad.”

Toad clenched his fists, and stared forward.

“Toad.”

“You can’t fuckin do that, Meg,” Toad said, his voice high, choking it out.

“What?” she asked. “With a dog? It’s really fine, I promise he’s not hurt by it at all.”

“That dog’s name. How immediately casually perfect you are about, about goddamn bestiality of all things, right when I thought, right when, right when I thought I found someone like me, genuinely fucked up like I am. And now already, two seconds later, I don’t know again,” he said. “The cows don’t have names.”

“Oh. Oh sweetheart.” Meg put a hand on his shoulder, and rubbed it gently as she continued to drive. “I’m sorry.”

“I’ve thought about burning that place down so it can’t hurt any calves ever again. I’ve thought about poisoning the corpses before they go out.” He sniffled. He shook his head. “I keep working there.”

Meg took her hand off Tiberius’s shoulder as she steered over into the other lane to pass a semi.

As they were passing, she said, “You don’t have to stay there.”

Tiberius nodded. “I was scared there wasn’t anything else.” He screwed the cap onto the peppermint schnapps and let it fall to the passenger side floor. “Take what I’m saying with a grain of salt, I am gone. I’m not making any sense.”

“I think I follow,” Meg said. “There are other jobs, dude. You could find something else.”

Tiberius sniffled, and shook his head. “I was scared there wasn’t anything else for a, for a monster like me, who would put so much blood and sweat and sleepless nights and shit into helping cows live through a place I knew was going to kill them. To treat them with love, genuine, heartfelt, nuzzling, caring, listening, devoted love, all while knowing this place was going to kill them. Not when they’re ready to go, or when, ooh, times are tough now so we have no choice. Never even, pretending, that that’s what that place is. That place just kills them. That’s what it’s for. That’s all it does. And I keep working there.”

“But that’s not you killing—”

“I do the slaughters.”

“Oh.”

Tiberius shuddered, and then went on, “I was, what... eight? The first time I helped. I was excited to, too, what little boy doesn’t want to see blood and guts? I knew what it was like to kill them and take them apart a long time before I ever realized there were lights on behind those eyes.”

“Jesus, Tiberius.”

Toad bent down and fished up the bottle of peppermint schnapps, and had a drink.

Neither of them knew what else to say, for the rest of the Guns N Roses song that was playing.

Portugal. The Man came on next.

Tiberius started to say something, and then stopped to gather his words, and then tried again. “Maybe I’m glad to know there’s a better version of someone who’s only into bestiality. A happy version. A non-monster version.”

“Well, thank you.” Meg sighed. “I’m sorry that’s what your experience has been.”

The car crested the top of a large hill. Looking forward through the windshield, there was a wide open grassy field below them, shimmering in the sunlight from recent rain. A rainbow stretched across the horizon ahead of them.

Tiberius shat himself aggressively.

Meg doubled over in the driver’s seat, screaming out one defeated laugh and not able to get the breath back in to keep laughing. Toad, a smug look overcoming his face, reached over and took hold of the steering wheel, doing his best to keep them from veering off the road as Meg recovered. He held off from taking another drink while his hand was on the wheel.

Present

“Hello?” Stefan said. “Meg?”

Meg snapped upright in her swivel chair again. She turned away from the window and the ocean, and back to her desk. “Sorry, just got handed something, one second.” She put the phone to her chest, and said, to her empty office, “Looks good at a glance, I’ll compare it with my figures and get back to you by, woof, by two at the latest, if nothing else comes up. Okay. Thank you.”

She leaned back in her chair, slid some papers from one side of her desk to the other, and then returned the phone to her ear again. “Sorry again about that.”

“No, no worries at all, sorry to keep you from your work,” Stefan said.

“Remind me of your question?”

“Any reason I shouldn’t hire this James fellow?”

Meg thought back on what Stefan had said Tiberius had been up to in the years since she’d known him. “No, no reason at all comes to mind.”

“Wonderful. Alright, thank you Meg.”

“Cheers.”

Meg hung up the phone, and went through the motions of getting back to work.